

Comment Letter Via Email – 1/18/08

JIM HUNT – jhunt2@gte.net

---

Jeff: As a member of the FPP Technical Review Panel, I have some concerns about the current outline and required format for Fire Protection plans, per the "Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content requirements; Wildland Fire and Fire Protection".

I have done several plans using the new format. Many of the plans I do are for commercial and industrial projects. The format and requirement of the DPLU document focuses on Wildland Fire Hazards ( see page 5; Introduction) and doesn't ask the author to propose the needed fire flow, duration, hydrant locations, etc and does not discuss structural risks or content and occupancy risks other than stating that the author must only identify proposed deviations from the codes.

A1 The purpose of a Fire Protection Plan is to be a Technical Report which identifies all risks of the development and proposes and documents all needed mitigations whether or not there is a wildland risk involved. Vegetation management is only one component of an FPP. Other components include water supply, hydrants, access, Fire Department response, structural safeguards, fire protection systems, and mitigations for the risks of the occupancy (such as a hazardous materials occupancy, large storage facilities, petroleum facility, high piled stock, high rise, Conference center, hotel, school, institution. etc.). Once the plan is approved by the AHJ, it should then be considered a contract between the AHJ and the developer. The plan if done correctly, puts the developer and subsequent owners and occupants on notice as to the risk and what exactly is being required, rather than a plan that just says " we will follow the codes". Codes are minimum standards and may need to be exceeded in various cases due to the on site use and occupancy risk. There are many risks involved in a development; not just wildland. In fact, there may be a minimal wildland threat to a site but there may be other significant risks which the development will create due to it's occupancy or size and which need to be addressed. The format does not provide for, or require, the author to evaluate these risks and include a technical response that would propose the reasonable needed Fire Protection to address all risks, wildland or not.

The format is more like a fire safety element of an EIR. I have done many. They typically don't get into the needed level of detail that a Fire Protection Plan needs and that I include in my plans.

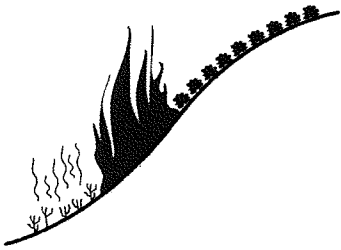
The format is a good start but needs significant revision in my opinion after doing FPP's for 28 years.

I would be happy to assist in designing a new outline for a more comprehensive technical report type format.

Jim Hunt

# The California Chaparral Institute

*...the voice of the chaparral*



June 16, 2008

San Diego County Department of Planning and Land Use  
Attention: Mario Covic  
5201 Ruffin Road , Suite B  
San Diego , CA 92123-1666

Dear Mr. Covic,

We are writing to provide you with our comments on the May 16, 2008, REVISION to the Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements for Wildland Fire and Fire Protection.

B-1 [ We would first like to thank you for incorporating some of our suggestions into the final document that we offered during our first review of the DRAFT in 2007. **However, we are once again amazed at the totally inadequate notification process the County has used to inform parties who are well known to be extremely interested in fire protection planning and biological resource protection.**

Although the County "respectfully declined" to expand its notification list, the County also indicated that the last notification was sent to private organizations that had requested notification. In our review letter of February 12, 2007, we explicitly requested to be included on such a notification list in the future. You not only failed to do so, but you failed to notify many of the individuals we are familiar with who commented on the original DRAFT. We find this to be a violation of public trust and urge you to correct this oversight.

B-2 [ As with the DRAFT development of the Guidelines, you have not included in the REVISION process anyone in the scientific or conservation community who is not somehow involved with development. If San Diego County sincerely intends to create an inclusive government and would prefer to avoid conflict that may very well lead to litigation, it is our suggestion that the County open up the planning process to all interested parties.

B-2  
cont. [ Regarding the document REVISION process itself, we strongly suggest the County submit to scientific peer review, especially those portions addressing fire regimes and the impact of fire on native ecosystems. The following sections are especially concerning to us:

B-3 [ Page 5: Section 1.2.2.2 Forests

*"The fire regime in the Peninsular Ranges of southern California have been shown to be more like the that of the Sierra San Pedro Mártir than to the Sierra Nevada (Skinner et al 2006)." ... "However, as a result of fire suppression the composition of the forests in southern California are different than those in the Sierra San Pedro Mártir (Gill 2002).*

While there is evidence to suggest that fire regimes in San Diego County forests have been disrupted by fire suppression, the Guideline's presumption that stand-replacing fires are unnatural needs additional examination. There are historical records of a stand replacing fire in Cuyamaca in the late 1800's. It is important in a public document that the County represents scientific knowledge properly and does not make statements that appear to ignore contrary data.

B-4 [ Page 6: Invasive Species

*"Chaparral habitats require stand-replacing fires at intervals of at least 20 years (Keeley 2003)."*

We do not know from which paper this conclusion has been drawn since a 2003 paper does not appear in the Guideline's reference list. Regardless, this is a complete misinterpretation of Keeley's work. Chaparral does NOT require fires "of at least 20 years apart." Such a short interval can lead to the very problem this Guideline section discusses, the type-conversion of chaparral by invasive species.

B-5 [ Page 19: Typical Adverse Effects

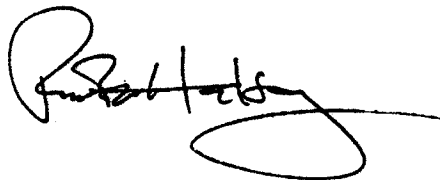
*"At the same time, fire suppression activities have resulted in older stands of native fuel, with a greater percentage dead, combustible material. When these old stands do burn, especially in a Santa Ana wind event, they burn far hotter and more destructively."*

This sentence appears to relate to post-fire ecosystem recovery. Hot, intense fires are natural for chaparral (where most of these fires burn). There is no scientific evidence that supports the notion that wind-driven fires in older stands are more destructive biologically. In fact, there appears to be a positive relationship between longer fire return intervals and robust chaparral recovery (Keeley 2005).

B-6 [ Since we just received the REVISION document this morning, we unfortunately do not have time to do a thorough review. But as the above problems indicate, the County and the public would be much better served if the County would allow representatives from both the scientific and conservation communities participate in the fire planning process.

0-6 | It is counterproductive to continue to exclude interested parties from such an important part of local government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard W. Halsey', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Richard W. Halsey  
Director  
California Chaparral Institute  
[www.californiachaparral.org](http://www.californiachaparral.org)

#### References

Keeley, J.E., A.H. Pfaff, and H.D. Safford. 2005b. Fire suppression impacts on postfire recovery of Sierra Nevada chaparral shrublands. *International Journal of Wildland Fire* 14: 255-265.

BY E-MAIL AND FAX

June 16, 2008

Mario Covic

Dept. of Planning and Land Use

5201 Ruffin Rd., Suite B

San Diego, CA 92123

**RE: Guidelines for Determining Significance for Fire Protection Planning**

Dear Mr. Covic:

The Endangered Habitats League (EHL) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft Guidelines revisions as they relate to fire risk and mitigation of that risk. EHL is a long-term stakeholder in the County's habitat and land use planning efforts and is Southern California's only regional conservation group.

C-1 [ EHL has two general concerns with the Draft Guidelines as they relate to fire protection. The first is that they presume that, even in very high-risk fire areas of the County, it is possible to permit development without secondary access consistent with mitigation of fire risk to a level of insignificance under CEQA. This conclusion is manifestly unsupportable, as an adequate alternative means of evacuation in high fuel loading areas (e.g. red shank chaparral) is the only realistic and reliable means to provide for the safety not only of residents, but also of fire fighters. If the County intends to permit single access development in such areas, it has a responsibility to openly acknowledge to the public at large and to eventual occupants of such developments the significant residual risk by an issuance of a statement of overriding considerations relating to fire during the CEQA process.

C-2 [ Indeed, the draft County Guidelines fail to adequately assess the denial of development permits as an option where a combination of high fire risk, difficult topographical conditions and lack of infrastructure make development an unreasonable risk given San Diego County's history. That is, the Guidelines must openly acknowledge that fire risk makes some areas of the County simply unsuitable for residential subdivision.

C-3 [ Second, given the extreme variability in capability and resources among the numerous fire protection agencies in the County, the Guidelines' reliance on a "travel time" as opposed to "response time" standard to measure the adequacy of emergency fire response is unwarranted. In many areas, more than one or two calls will overwhelm available resources. Other areas are not staffed 24/7, or are staffed remotely. Finally, in all areas of the County it is the time it takes to *respond* that matters; not just the travel time.

C-4 [ While we are aware that the Public Resources Element of the adopted General Plan uses

C-4  
cat

travel times, that approach is now clearly outdated . There is no requirement that determining CEQA mitigation must comport with the method specified in the General Plan, no matter how obsolete. Since using response times is the only truly accurate way of measuring the adequacy of emergency response, this method must be used in determining compliance with CEQA.

Thank you for your attention to EHL's views.

Sincerely,

Dan Silver, M.D.

Executive Director

**ANNE S. FEGE, Ph.D., M.B.A.**  
**12934 TEXANA STREET**  
**SAN DIEGO, CA 92129**  
**EMAIL AFEGE@AOL.COM, PHONE 858-472-1293**

June 16, 2008

Mr. Mario Covic  
Department of Planning and Land Use  
5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B  
San Diego, CA 92123-1666

Subject: Comments on the County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements, Wildland Fire and Fire Protection

Dear Mr. Covic:

The subject proposed revisions was just brought to my attention this morning, and this letter provides limited comments due to the inadequate notification.

**1. Request for extension of comment period, and transmission of proposed revisions to interested parties.**

0-1  
In February 2007, I and dozens of individuals and organizations commented on these guidelines (LIST OF PERSONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND PUBLIC AGENCIES THAT COMMENTED ON THE GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE AND THE REPORT FORMAT AND CONTENT GUIDELINES WILDLAND FIRE AND FIRE PROTECTION, dated MARCH 19, 2007). We would legally be considered the "most interested" parties for further proposed revisions to the same county guidelines. I did not receive notice of the May 15, 2008 proposed revision from the county, and now I ask for a reasonable amount of time to review and comment. Please extend the comment period 30 days to July 15, 2008 and send a copy of the proposed guidelines to all persons, organizations, and public agencies.

**2. References and applications of scientific literature.**

0-2  
Much of the text on existing conditions (section 1.2) still focuses on forests, yet chaparral is the region's dominant plant community. Scientific publications on regeneration of southern California natural areas after the 1993 wildfires (including San Diego County) would greatly strengthen this section, particularly these two refereed articles:

02  
cont  
Keeley, J.E., C.J. Fotheringham and M. Baer-Keeley. 2005. Determinants of postfire recovery and succession in Mediterranean-climate shrublands of California. *Ecological Applications* 15(5):1515-1534.

Keeley, J.E., M. Baer-Keeley and C.J. Fotheringham. 2005. Alien plant dynamics following fire in Mediterranean-climate California shrublands. *Ecological Applications* 15(6):2109-2125.

### 3. Firebrands.

03  
Please acknowledge the contribution of structural maintenance and auxiliary structures on firebrands, section 1.3.4. The proposed revision is to add the following sentence, "Flammable vegetation adjacent (within ten feet) of a structure acts as a receptacle for fire brands, and will impact the structure." Please ALSO add the phrase, "and other combustible materials (wood piles, household debris, wood fences, decks, and other auxiliary structures)... act as a receptacle for fire brands...."

Continued emphasis on access, firefighting infrastructure, and Ignition Resistive Building construction is to be commended. The most lives will be saved by the required improved access for evacuation, and the greatest property protection achieved by the required Ignition Resistive Building Construction.

### 4. Application of fuel model types developed for southern California.

04  
[The existing vegetation should be included in the project description (1.1.2), for areas that are projected for fuel reduction.]<sup>05</sup> [The guidelines still emphasize fuel models 1, 4, and 10, whereas there are Fuel Model types that are more accurate for San Diego's conditions. There are fuel models developed for southern California vegetation, including USFS 15 through USFS 18 for chamise, ceonothus, and sagebrush/buckwheat, and are described at [http://www.icesb.ucsb.edu/resac/fuels\\_mapping3.html](http://www.icesb.ucsb.edu/resac/fuels_mapping3.html). There are now 40 fuel model types (expanded from the 13 fuel model types) that allow more precise modeling of fuel loads, described in:

Scott, Joe H.; Burgan, Robert E. 2005. Standard fire behavior fuel models: a comprehensive set for use with Rothermel's surface fire spread model. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS-GTR-153. Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. 72 p. ]

06  
The application of inappropriate fuel models that overestimate site vegetation and defensible space will likely result in excessive vegetation reduction. Unnecessary defensible space is likely to reduce property risks only a small amount, if any, and will substantially increase costs to mitigate for subsequent erosion and habitat losses, maintain weeds, and suppress local ignitions. Such a limited benefit becomes a very expensive long-term cost to the homeowners, homeowners' associations, and fire departments.



07 5. **Future availability of irrigation water supplies for defensible space areas.**

A year after these guidelines were implemented in mid-2007, there is even greater concern about irrigation water availability for any defensible space that provides limited or no additional wildfire risk reduction. Requiring irrigated vegetation management beyond the homesite (30 to 50 feet) may be excessive, risky, and perhaps impossible. When irrigation water supplies to San Diego are curtailed for general landscaping, the dead, desiccated plants will be highly flammable and create conditions for further weed invasion.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these proposed revisions to the guidelines.

Sincerely,



ANNE S. FEGE, Ph.D., M.B.A.  
Botany Research Associate, San Diego Natural History Museum, and  
Adjunct Professor, San Diego State University

Proposed revised outline for Fire Protection Plans.

The purpose of this proposal is to revise the required outline in the DPLU 3-19-07 Report Format and Content requirements for Wildland fire and Fire Protection, to provide a more comprehensive risk based Fire Protection Plan for all occupancies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION (project location, description and environmental setting)

E-1 2. GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

This section needs to be expanded to also include Guidelines for determining significance of the risk of the occupancy unrelated to wildland fire, for example hotels, multi family occupancies, major shopping center, major public assemblage occupancy, industrial or commercial occupancy. Major fires in such occupancies can cause life loss, major fire loss, heavy commitment of Fire Department resources, and can spread into wildland.

E-2 3. ADEQUATE EMERGENCY SERVICES

This Section needs to discuss the first alarm response to a wildland fire and to a structure fire at the development. It needs to list types of apparatus and the response staffing, and the plan must state whether there are needs for more specialized apparatus, additional responders via Automatic Aid, etc.

E-3 4. ACCESS.

This section needs to also address on-site fire lanes, Code requirements for such, and widths if aerial ladder operations are needed. It needs to also address any exceptions to secondary access, and the proposed mitigations/justifications to do so.

E-4 5. WATER SUPPLY:

This section needs to also address the needed fire flow per the Fire Code, and, if private system, the amount of stored water and details re tank location, connections, access, refill capability, signage, fuel mod around tank, etc. This Section must also include any flow test results available from Water District or Fire Agency, and must also state the fire hydrant locations and spacing on roads, intersections, entrance to cul-de-sac bulbs, etc. It needs to also state required individual fire hydrant flows, minimum main and lateral sizes, possible need for fire pumps etc. This is important so the project Engineer knows what is required.

E-5 6. IGNITION RESISTANT CONSTRUCTION AND FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEMS.

This Section needs to list the construction features as required by Chapter 7-A and County Fire Code. I don't agree with listing deviations only. It needs to also state Fire Sprinkler requirements. The owner and Architect need to know up front and agree to the construction requirements to avoid future problems/disputes. In addition, the

E.S.  
cont

consultant should be required to recommend needed construction features that may exceed code (Codes are minimums) based on the on site risk or occupancy risk. This may be 4 hour fire walls, Firefighter access doors, upgraded fire sprinkler systems, high piled stock requirements, wet standpipes, roof access, property walls, etc. it should also discuss any provisions for sheltering in place. It must also address Fire Department Connection locations.

E-16

7. DEFENSIBLE SPACE AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT.

I don't agree that it needs to list proposed plant species. What it does need to do is list what plants will be prohibited, including what ornamental vegetation is prohibited next to structures. The recommended sizes and prescriptions for the Fuel Modification Zones must be included, and this also includes roadsides.

E-7

8. TECHNICAL OCCUPANCY SPECIFIC MITIGATIONS:

This Section needs to be a Technical Report that lists the various structural and occupancy risks and then lists the mitigations. This would apply to large single family homes (such as over 10,000 square feet), multi family dwellings, hotels, institutions, Schools, Public Assemblages, commercial and industrial occupancies.

9. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

10. LIST OF PREPARERS

11. TECHNICAL APPENDICES (as currently listed in the current guideline)

28

The current outline is focused on vegetation fires and the intent seems to be focused on single-family subdivisions. A Fire Protection Plan must clearly address all occupancy risks as wildland fire can spread to such occupancies, storage yards, etc and cause a major structure fire or exterior storage fire. Fire can also spread from a building or storage yard into the wildland. In addition, a major structure fire can require commitment of numerous Fire Department resources to control it, which can result in them not being available for response to a wildland fire. The other reason for the detail I am recommending is so the applicant, and the project engineer and architect are on notice as to what the risks and requirements are to be; especially if it is necessary to exceed the minimums in the Codes due to the on site risk. I feel that this level of detail is needed for all projects, including those that have an EIR requirement, in order to consider all risks and propose mitigations.

Jim Hunt

**Comment Letter Via Email – 6/11/08**  
**JIM HUNT – jhunt2@gte.net**

---

Mario: here are my comments on the revised draft you have sent out for public review, regarding Fire Protection Plans:

**GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE:**

F-1 [ 1. Section 3; page 20: "technical report":

add Multi family dwellings ( apartment houses, condominiums, etc), and add after Fire Code issues; "and needed occupancy and structural mitigations."

F-2 [ 2. Section 5.1.1.2: Applied standards: Page 24: add " supervised fire sprinklers" to acceptable mitigations.

F-3 [ 3. Section 5.2.1.2: Page 29; Shelter in place:

Include: residential, commercial and industrial occupancies.

Change construction to CBC Chapter 7-A. refer to latest County Fire Code Section 4710.1. ✓

F-4 [ 4. Section 5.2.4: Page 31: Add 75,000 pound road load capacity for commercial , industrial and multi family residential to support an aerial ladder truck.

F-5 [ 5. Section 5.4.1: Page 36; Remove "enhanced". New construction name is "Ignition resistant" per CBC Chapter 7-A. See latest County Fire Code.

F-6 [ 6. Page 38; defensible space plant list. I do not agree with the County approved defensible space plant list that you reference. There are some flammable plants ( shrubs and trees) on that list, including palms, manzanita, etc. I can provide you with a prohibited plant list which I have developed.

**FIRE PROTECTION PLAN FORMAT:**

F-7 [ 1. Table of contents: Need to use BEHAVE model edition 3.0.2 which is latest edition

F-8 [ 2. Page 1; 3rd bullet: Letter report: Eliminate " Article 86". It no longer exists. Refer to New County Fire Code Section 4703.

F-9 [ 3. regarding FPP language being mandatory, the Consultant makes recommendations unless something is a mandatory code requirement. Recommendations may exceed a code requirement, if needed. Once the Fire Authority approves the plan, it becomes mandatory, so the way to address this is to state that when the plan is approved, then all requirements and consultant recommendations become mandatory.

F.10 [ 4. Section 4.3.1: Page 8: change this so that the 2500 GPM in mains is a minimum. There may be occupancies that require more than this ( commercial, industrial, multi family).

F.11 [ 5. Section 2.3; Letter report: remove " not a fire consultant". If an applicant wants to hire a consultant they have the right to do so. No different than you can write a letter yourself or hire an attorney to write it.

F.12 [ 6. Page 17; letter report: water supply to be MINIMUM 2500 gpm. Per the State Fire Code, individual hydrant flows are to be 1000 GPM at 20 PSI rather than 1500 GPM.

F.13 [ 7. Section 1.2; page 3: Guidance for preparation of an FPP: Note that the Fire Protection Plan when submitted to the County is the formal plan; not a draft. A draft has been done before that submittal and sent to applicant to review and approval. If the County then comments on it, they are commenting on the formal plan.

Let me know if any questions. Thanks for asking for my comments.

thanks

Jim Hunt